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Back to the Roots! The Romantic perception of Germanic Pagans and its impact on contemporary Paganism

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Introduction



*The Russian pagan folk metal band Arkona (Аркона)
(© Arkona 2009)*

Na Moey Zemle means ‘in my land’ in Russian, and it is the title of a fifteen minutes epic song by the Russian Pagan metal band Arkona. The song narrates about the adventures of a Slavic warrior from a bygone pagan past, who travels throughout Europe in order to find happiness. The warrior

meets the indigenous people of every country and asks them what it is that makes them happy. The

natives all state in their mother tongues that the beauty of their own land, their own people, their own traditions and their own gods make them happy. In the song, bands from various European countries impersonate these native-born people in the vernacular. For instance, Månegarm sings in Swedish, Obtest in Lithuanian, Skyforger in Latvian, Menhir in German, and Heidevolk in Dutch. Menhir explains: ‘Thüringer Land, wie bist du so schön, wie eine junge Maid’¹, and Heidevolk states:

U volgde de zon

Door uw goden begeleid

Westwaarts bent u gereisd

Naar de grenzen van het land

Waar de zee de grond verzwelgt

Naar het land der drakenschrei

Het oord, met mijn aard vergroeid

¹ Arkona 2009; Arkona 2010, ‘Thuringian land, you are so beautiful, like a young maiden,’ my translation.

Heeft uw pad u heengeleid
Welkom in mijn vaderland
Warm u aan de haard, mijn gast
En laaf u aan ons bier
Ver zijn eens ook wij gereisd
Maar ons geluk ligt hier
Waar mijn broeders rond het vuur
Drinken in 't nachtelijk uur
Waar verhalen en gelach
Klinken tot het aanbreken der dag
Onze vreugde vinden wij
In de wouden, in de velden en op de hei
Onze vreugden vinden wij
Aan de oevers van de Rijn.²

When the Slavic warrior returns home—having understood the wisdom of these indigenous people—he knows that the native Slavic land is the place where he can find happiness.³

² Arkona 2009; Arkona 2010, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=G-DE6-5rKLY>, 11:50-13:40. 'You followed the sun, guided by your gods, you travelled to the west, to the borders of the country, where the sea engulfs the land, to the land of the dragon cry, the place, which is one with my nature, your path brought you here, welcome to my fatherland, warm up at the fireplace, my guest, and drink our beer, once we have travelled from far as well, but our happiness is here, where my brothers around the fire, drink during midnight, where stories and laughter, sound until the day dawns, we find our joy, in the woods, on the fields and on the heath, we find our joy at the banks of the Rhine,' my translation.

³ Arkona 2009, <http://www.arkona-russia.com/en/ediscography/285.html>.



The Dutch pagan folk metal band Heidevolk (© Bardur and Awik)

What has this contemporary Pagan metal to do with the perceptions of Germanic pagans during the Romantic Era? It is often stated that the image of pagans, which is appealing to this day, arose during the Romantic Period.⁴ For instance, Ronald Hutton states that: ‘I would argue [...] that the characteristic language of a committed modern paganism has its direct origin in German Romanticism, the result of a fusion in late eighteenth-century Germany of three powerful forces: admiration for ancient Greece, nostalgia for a vanished past, and the desire for an organic unity between people, culture and nature.’⁵ Central to Romanticism, then, is ‘its quest for a unifying national identity which generated a new interest in rural culture as a promising hunting-ground for a ‘definitive’ Germanity’.⁶ This search led to interest in the past, including the pagan past of the perceived Germanic ancestors. Striking is that the early Christians portrayed a negative image of pagans, which became positively revaluated during the Romantic Era and led to appropriation by present-day Pagans. The latter is a contemporary nature religion which finds inspiration in ancient pagan religions, for instance of the Celtic and Germanic tribes.⁷ Note that, in line with Michael York, paganism of the ancient Germanics is written with a lower-case ‘p’ and indicates ‘an affirmation of interactive and polymorphic sacred relationships by the individual or community with the tangible and/or nonemperical,’ while contemporary Paganism—with a capital ‘P’—is ‘a newer, self-conscious and self-identified movement.’⁸ York has developed a definition that

⁴ Hutton 2001, p. 21; Partridge 2004, p. 87.

⁵ Hutton 2001, p. 21.

⁶ Hutton 2001, p. 113.

⁷ Schattevoet 2012, pp. 139, 152-154.

⁸ Harvey 2011, p. 223; Schattevoet 2012, pp. 134, 135.

covers both and therefore suggests continuity: ‘Paganism represents a theological perspective and consequent practice that, despite its plethora of micro and local expressions, is a viable and distinguishable religiospiritual position.’⁹

Here, I will not discuss the complex phenomenon of contemporary Paganism, but instead examine the roots of this fascination with a pagan past. However, I do give examples of the Romantic impact on both Germany as a nation and Paganism as a religion. In this article, initial research on the Romantic perceptions of Germanic pagans is presented, and I will explain the *Germanenmythos* of the Romantic scholar Johann Gottfried von Herder (1744-1803). The aim is to discuss Herder’s contribution to the quest for the perceived pagan ancestors, their culture, and—most important—their religion. Therefore, the religious aspects of this rooting for the past are central, instead of, for instance, merely nationalistic aspects. The latter have already been researched elaborately. For the construction of both a national identity and a religious Pagan identity, attribution and appropriation of the Germanic culture have been momentous. I will argue that Herder has paved the way for a lasting fascination with the particular culture of the Germanics—including the pre-Christian pagan religions. He has contributed by developing the idea of the *Volksgeist* which expresses the uniqueness of every people—from their pagan genesis to this very day. It has led to a quest for the own roots to rediscover the culture in its ‘purest’ form, including interest in the ancient religion(s) of the Germanic people.

To understand Herder’s *Germanenmythos* considering religion, I will examine his ideas first. Then I will discuss three theories, namely about invented traditions, invented sacred traditions, and history and memory together with attribution and appropriation. Herder’s *Germanenmythos* will be connected with present-day examples, most notably of contemporary Paganism. Finally, I will draw the conclusion that the works of Herder have contributed to the fascination with the own particular—and in this case, Germanic—pagan past, which, from a Religious Studies perspective, is significant for a contemporary religious Pagan identity.

⁹ Schattevoet 2012, pp. 134, 135; York 2005, p. 14.

Johann Gottfried von Herder and the *Germanenmythos*

The *Germanenmythos* is the construction of the Germanic identity, including all attributions and appropriations that belong to this identity. The myth arose when the national identity became more appealing than the model based on the Classics. Previously, the ideal was the supposedly universal culture of Antiquity, and a Christian unity that was connected with Latin as the language of the elite. However, since the rise of Humanism in the sixteenth century, belief in this blueprint became problematic due to the resulting religious disunity. The Germanics became increasingly more appealing than the distant culture of the Romans and Greeks. The latter were portrayed as old and outdated, while the Germanics were seen as ancient but vital and worth rediscovering. The *Germanenmythos* implies that the ancient Germanics had a rich culture and lived in their own land, with their own traditions, and speaking vernacular—German. It also implies that this indigenous particular culture should not base itself on the outmoded, distant, overpowering, Classical culture, which was discarded since the fall of Rome. Romantic scholars also noticed the failing of Napoleon, who wanted to impose a French particular culture as a universal ideal. Therefore, within this historical context, the particularistic culture of a folk became appealing and a return to the own roots was longed for.¹⁰

The roots were found in the own folk of every nation. Charles de Montesquieu spoke of the folk identity and during the Romantic Era this developed into the idea of a *Volksgeist*. Herder adopted this concept and the notion of the Germanic *Volksgeist* was born.¹¹ Influenced by the Roman historian Publius Cornelius Tacitus, the Germanic pagans were perceived to be the ancestors of the contemporary inhabitants of Prussia who share this unique Germanic *Volksgeist*.¹² Also, a fascination with Scandinavian culture arose due to the Scandinavian Renaissance in the fifteenth century and the discovery of historical texts and archaeological findings. This led to the connection of German culture with—even more ancient—Scandinavian culture in the eighteenth century due to perceived similarities, for instance when it comes to linguistics, history, and pagan religion and mythology. Therefore the interest in the ancient Scandinavian culture from the fifteenth century onwards, and subsequently the Germanic culture, resulted in the Romantic view of the past of the perceived pagan ancestors

¹⁰ Monyk 2006, p. 22; Raedts 2011, pp. 55, 124, 130, 131, 246, 345.

¹¹ Monyk 2006, p. 22.

¹² Monyk 2006, pp. 26, 27; Raedts 2011, p. 163.

who share the same roots and *Volksgeist*.¹³ Another development that was important for the *Germanenmythos* was the discovery of Native Americans. Jean-Jacques Rousseau had argued that these nature people—being in the primitive stage of the development of humanity—were more pure and happier than modern human beings. In this regard, it was stated that the pagan ancestors of Europe would have been more pure and happier than its contemporary inhabitants as well. Therefore, Romantic scholars were determined to find the origin of their own culture.¹⁴ If every particular culture would find her own *Volksgeist*, then Europe would rediscover its own strength: Rome has fallen, but Europe has arisen. The diversity of all different, unique cultures that are loyal to their roots would form a flourishing Europe.¹⁵

Just like Rousseau, Herder believed that every culture had a unique *Volksgeist*, which was most pure in the primitive stage—the ancient Germanic people for the Germans. The *Volksgeist* of a people could be best expressed in the ancient language and poetry of a folk, and that should be at the core of the contemporary Germanic identity. For him, the vernacular was ‘as the language of childhood and of the happy savages, monotone, honest, and the language of nature’.¹⁶ He thought it was very important that every people would speak their own language—in this case German—because otherwise a people would lose their identity. Due to the self-assumed universal culture of Rome, and later the Roman Catholic Church and its Latin, alienation of the particular culture had taken place. However, the universal Christian culture was perfectly compatible with Germanic wisdom, according to Herder. By returning to its roots—the *Volksgeist*—Prussia, which was divided at that time, would unite and become a strong, German-speaking nation. Just like the ancestors, the ancient Germanics, the contemporary people of Prussia would become a happy and prosperous society, having a unique national identity. The idea of the *Volksgeist* was not only significant for unity within a culture, but also for the unity of Europe. It should be noted that Herder adds that the *Volksgeist* has both positive and negative aspects, but that the aim of a nation is to find ‘the centre of happiness within itself’.¹⁷ This Germanic wisdom of the *Volksgeist* could be rediscovered through the heritage of the pagan ancestors—more specifically in its folk poetry.¹⁸ As Peter Raedts states:

¹³ Monyk 2006, pp. 23, 26; Raedts 2011, p. 146.

¹⁴ Raedts 2011, pp. 133, 134.

¹⁵ Raedts 2011, pp. 77, 129, 135, 148, 149.

¹⁶ Raedts 2011, pp. 148, 161, 165.

¹⁷ Monyk 2006, p. 23; Raedts 2011, pp. 77, 89-92, 129, 135, 137, 147-151, 346, 347.

¹⁸ Raedts 2011, pp. 77, 129, 135, 148, 149.

Only literature rooted in the own soil, being an expression of the own religion which remembers the own history, has enough vitality to renew and fulfil itself constantly, she is old but not outdated¹⁹

To rediscover the legacy of the ancient bards, skalds and troubadours, Herder—but also Goethe, the brothers Grimm and others—visited the countryside, the remote areas, where it was believed that from generation to generation the ancient roots of the Germanics had been preserved in the culture of the common folk. As Heidevolk sings: ‘in de wouden, in de velden en op de hei’, and ‘waar mijn broeders rond het vuur, drinken in ’t nachtelijk uur, waar verhalen en gelach, klinken tot het aanbreken der dag’.²⁰ The Romantics believed that they tried to save the sources of ancient Europe from extinction.²¹ The thirteenth century *Nibelungenlied* became the national epic in which the heroic Siegfried was praised, and compilations of collected folk tales and songs were published. However, this folk literature turned out not to be that ancient, but an eighteenth century memory of a bygone Germanic past, an ‘invention of tradition,’ as we will see. The perception of Germanic pagans had been positively altered by that time.

The invention of the *Germanenmythos*

The past is a grab bag from which every new generation can draw pieces and fragments to construct a story to help her understand her own time²²

Peter Raedts writes this in his book *De Ontdekking van de Middeleeuwen* and it applies to the drawing of ‘pieces and fragments’ from a bygone pagan past as well. Three theories will be discussed here to better understand Herder’s *Germanenmythos*—his perception of the Germanic identity whereby continuity between the ancient pagan Germanics and contemporary Germans, but also Pagans, is assumed.

Firstly, the *Germanenmythos* can be better understood in the light of what historians Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger name ‘invented traditions’.²³ In their book, *The*

¹⁹ Raedts 2011, p. 131. My translation.

²⁰ Raedts 2011, p. 137, 138, 139, 141, 142, 147-149, 152, 157, 159, 162; Arkona 2009. ‘In the woods, on the fields and on the heath [...] where my brothers around the fire, drink during midnight, where stories and laughter, sound until the day dawns,’ my translation.

²¹ Raedts 2011, pp. 138, 139, 141, 142.

²² Raedts 2011, p. 355, my translation.

²³ Hobsbawm & Ranger 2012, p. 2.

Invention of Tradition, they argue that contemporary traditions are often not as archaic as they seem, but in fact new inventions or constructions, and therefore ‘invented traditions’.

Hobsbawm and Ranger define this key term as

a set of practices, normally governed by overtly or tacitly accepted rules and of a ritual or symbolic nature, which seek to inculcate certain values and norms of behaviour by repetition, which automatically implies continuity with the past. [...] The historic past into which the new tradition is inserted need not be lengthy, stretching back into the assumed mists of time. [...] The past, real or invented, to which they refer imposes fixed (normally formalized) practices, such as repetition²⁴

According to Hobsbawm and Ranger, all invented traditions use history to legitimise actions in the present, and function as cohesion for the group.²⁵ Both history and cohesion are significant within nationalism as well as religion.²⁶ Within a religious framework, new traditions are being adapted, ritualised and institutionalised for new aims, or the rise of new traditions take place.²⁷

A brief example within a Scottish context will illustrate Hobsbawm and Ranger’s theory. Hugh Trevor-Roper has shown that the Scottish kilt as we know it today is actually an eighteenth century invention by an English Quaker who designed it for his Scottish workers. Wearing a belted plaid, which is the precursor of the kilt, was being associated with the poor, savage and rebellious Scottish highlanders, because this garment was ideal for the environment they lived in, ‘[to] skip over the rocks and bogs and lie all night in the hills’.²⁸ From 1746 onwards, it was forbidden to wear highland dress, except for the Highland regiments, and thus a nostalgic and romanticised view of the primitive Celtic kilt-wearing ancestors arose. The lower classes, who had worn the belted plaid, had stopped wearing it, but the middle- and upper classes became enthusiasts, and noblemen were thrilled to be portrayed wearing a kilt in secret. After the repeal of the prohibition in 1782, these men wore this garment proudly in public. A final breakthrough for the kilt took place in 1822, when, on the occasion of the visit of the Hanoverian King George IV to Edinburgh, Walter Scott called the Scottish chiefs for a ‘gathering of the clans’ in the new, invented kilt with their specific—also invented—clan tartan. This was the beginning of a historically incorrect, but Romantic idea of

²⁴ Hobsbawm & Ranger 2012, pp. 1, 2.

²⁵ Hobsbawm & Ranger 2012, p. 12.

²⁶ Hobsbawm & Ranger 2012, p. 14.

²⁷ Hobsbawm & Ranger 2012, pp. 6-8.

²⁸ Trevor-Roper 2012, pp. 21.

the Scottish-Celtic culture as envisioned by Scott—an ‘invention of tradition’. In this context, the popularity of the highland dress is a down-top movement: the belted plaid used to be the garment of the lower working classes, but after the invention of the kilt, the middle- and high classes appropriated the garb to associate it with a romantic view of the past. In this manner, the powerful elite had adapted customs of the subversive folk. A similar phenomenon recurs considering the Romantic perceptions of Germanics.²⁹

In *The Invention of Sacred Tradition*, James R. Lewis and Olav Hammer delve into the religious aspects of invented traditions. They argue that traditions are based on the claim that certain cultural elements are rooted in the past, but that these are often invented traditions which appear ancient but are recent innovations.³⁰ In a religious context, they even state:

Whereas Hobsbawm and Ranger point to the eighteenth century as the time when traditions began to be invented on a massive scale, the invention of sacred traditions appears to be a perennial motive in religious history.³¹

Religions often claim that their tradition can be traced back to a revelation by a transcendent source, and it has narratives about the transmission of this revelation until this very day.³² Lewis and Hammer state that there is a longing for an idealised past, which contributes to the cohesion of a group because its members can identify with a shared past—whether this is historically accurate or not.³³

The latter has to do with the difference between history and memory, as Willem Frijhoff names it. History is concerned with a process based on scholarly research which aims to give a factual view of history. Memory, however, is the culture of memory. It includes the memory of history and therefore it does not have to be historically correct. Moreover, it can be an invention of tradition. In the case of memory, history is being attributed and appropriated by a person, group, or nation.³⁴ It is significant to point out that, in line with Michel Foucault, attribution is seen as a reaction to power due to the tension between the powerful and subversives. This is a down-top movement, because the interest in the pagan

²⁹ Trevor-Roper 2012, pp. 15-41.

³⁰ Lewis & Hammer 2007, p. 1.

³¹ Lewis & Hammer 2007, p. 2.

³² Lewis & Hammer 2007, p. 2.

³³ Lewis & Hammer 2007, pp. 4-6.

³⁴ Frijhoff 2010, p. 12.

Germanic past originated from the people and their folk stories and folk songs. Gradually the elite—the Romantic thinkers—became fascinated with this folk culture.

Appropriation is also part of religions, according to Frijhoff. He states that religion has become a way of thinking, instead of a way of being, which determines the identity of a person, and can lead to a sense of connection with a community of believers.³⁵ The religious identity can be constructed by appropriating history as a shared culture of memory including a certain value pattern. According to Frijhoff, the contemporary religious identity is an identity of choice that arises due to the interaction between the individual, the group, and the past by means of the process of memory and appropriation.³⁶ This recurs in the case of contemporary Paganism, because within this religion, the memory of a pagan past gives inspiration for constructing a contemporary religious identity, whereby the land in which one lives and the deities that were worshiped by the ancestors play a significant role for religious beliefs, practices and experiences. This memory is based on the ‘reconstructed’ ancient pagan religions, based on historical and archaeological sources.³⁷ For instance, folk poetry or pagan mythology—like the *Edda*—and folk stories form important sources to ‘reinvent’ the ancient indigenous pagan religions for the present-day person. Ethnic Paganism, as the term suggests, is a branch of Paganism which is connected with a certain people, for instance the Germans, Scandinavians, Celts, Romans, Greeks, Slavics, or others. In the spirit of Herder, Graham Harvey explains that Ethnic Paganism:

Contest the notion that the best religions must be global, if not truly universal, in message, application, and impact. [...] Instead, they reverse the claim and assert that the best, most “authentic” religions are those that evolve among a particular people in a particular place³⁸

A shared memory of the past that is being appropriated can lead to imagined communities, as Benedict Anderson calls it. These communities transmit memories of history by means of communication, whereby a certain perception arises which does not have to be historically correct. The communication provides for collective memory, which is important for a shared collective memory of the past. It is significant to note that this memory is not focussed on the past, but is concerned with the perception of history, which provides group

³⁵ Frijhoff 2010, p. 8.

³⁶ Frijhoff 2010, p. 22.

³⁷ Harvey 2007, pp. 278, 279, 283, 284, 287.

³⁸ Harvey 2007, p. 286.

formation in the present.³⁹ In this manner, peoples and nations invoke a continuous view and memory, whereby history is being adapted based on perception, memory and appropriation. The content of that memory is not set, but changes throughout time.⁴⁰ As Frijhoff states: ‘The historical object exists on the intersection of dynamic formation processes of *history* and *memory*.’⁴¹ Therefore, he advocates for examination of the culture of memory within Religious Studies, because ‘the need for memory is the form in which the twenty-first century moulds its religious longing’.⁴²

The culture of memory can be expressed in rituals of memory and places of memory. For instance, monuments can become heritage sites which commemorate

a past of which the memory has to be rediscovered [...], tell a story or assume a ritual that allows for multiple interpretations and forms of appropriation⁴³

An example of a place of memory is the *Hermannsdenkmal* in the Teutoburg Forest, where the national identity is being connected with the memory of a bygone Germanic past. The *Hermannsdenkmal*—or Hermann’s Memorial—is a statue of 53 meters of Arminius—also known as Hermann der Cherusker—and was established in 1875. It commemorates the first century leader of the Germanic tribes who fought against the Romans during the Battle of the Teutoburg Forest. The statue reads: ‘Germany’s unity, my strength, my strength, Germany’s power.’⁴⁴ Here, the Germanic hero Hermann is being commemorated with this monument and has become the symbol of the nation—



The Hermannsdenkmal

together with Germania. It is remarkable that Hermann has Germanic traits, while Germania—and national personifications of other countries, such as Marianne of France, and the Netherlands Maid—have a Classical look and are often based on Minerva or Athena. In 1888 the cornerstone for a similar Hermann statue—the Hermann

³⁹ Frijhoff 2010, p. 17.

⁴⁰ Frijhoff 2010, pp. 8, 18, 19.

⁴¹ Frijhoff 2010, p. 20. My translation.

⁴² Frijhoff 2010, p. 21. My translation.

⁴³ Frijhoff 2010, pp. 15, 21. My translation.

⁴⁴ ‘Deutsche Einigkeit Meine Stärke, Meine Stärke Deutschlands Macht,’ my translation.

Heights Monument—was laid by ‘the Order of the Sons of Hermann’ in the United States to commemorate the German ancestry of many inhabitants of Minnesota.

Not far from the *Hermannsdenkmal* is the rock formation Externsteine, which used to be a cultic place for the ancient Germanics, more specifically the Saxons, and which is until this very day an attraction for contemporary Pagans, among other people. In the memory of their perceived ancestors, present-day Pagans celebrate the winter and summer solstices at this place, which can be seen as a ritual of memory and suggests continuity with the ancient Germanic pagans. The rock formation also recalls the *irminsul*⁴⁵ which allegedly stood there until the Christian monarch Charlemagne—the ruler—destroyed it in 722 during the war against the pagan Saxons—the subversives.⁴⁶ It is remarkable that this symbol of the *irminsul* is used within contemporary Paganism as well, for instance as a necklace. The Externsteine, then, are a monument of the memory of the defeat of the Germanics, but also of their religious practices.

Both the monuments and the rock formation can be understood as places of memory that function to commemorate the Germanic ancestors who are momentous for the contemporary national and religious identity. The *Germanenmythos* can therewith be seen as an invented tradition, which recalls an idealised past by means of appropriation by both German Romantics and contemporary Pagans. This has led to attributions of what it means to be Germanic, whereby the perception of Germanic pagans has developed throughout time.

Conclusion



It can be concluded that Herder’s legacy lives on in contemporary Paganism. Herder’s understanding of a unique *Volksgeist* of every culture which is being expressed in the vernacular and poetry of a folk—the perceived ancestors—is being echoed in what the Pagan metal bands in Arkona’s song explain to the traveling warrior. It is remarkable that Arkona—a band which was formerly named *Hyperborea*—transmits this message by means of a narrative, whereby every band sings in their mother tongue. Considering

⁴⁵ The *irminsul* is a pillar that probably symbolised the world tree and played an important role in the pagan cult practices of the Saxons.

⁴⁶ Derolez 1959, 142; Kaster 2000, p. 105.

religion, the song adds that every people should return to the worship of their own gods. It is debatable if Herder—being a Lutheran Christian—went this far and advocated for a return to the indigenous pagan religion. However, in the spirit of Herder, it can be concluded that a folk would be happiest if they would live in accordance with their own *Volksgeist* and return to the pagan nature religion, instead of trying to adapt to Christianity. For, like all other aspects of culture, religion is particularistic instead of universal.

Herder has contributed to the invention of tradition in the form of the *Germanenmythos*, which assumes that the Germanic people are one in their particular *Volksgeist*. It thereby suggests continuity between ancient Germanics and present-day Germans and Pagans. Considering religion, living in accordance with the *Volksgeist* means practicing the indigenous folk religion of the ancient Germanic pagans. In order to be a happy unity, an idealised pagan past is envisioned in which the old gods were worshiped which is relevant and gives inspiration for present-day Pagans. The memory of a shared pagan past leads to the construction of a contemporary religious identity by means of the appropriation of history, and functions as cohesion for this group of contemporary Pagans. In the context of Romanticism, there is a down-top movement, whereby the elite becomes interested in the folk culture of the subversives. However, in the case of contemporary Paganism, a Pagan identity is being appropriated as a meaningful religious worldview.

In a broader perspective, Herder can give insight into the construction of a contemporary European identity because his idea of the *Volksgeist* explains how the diversity of cultures within Europe can be a successful unity. Just like the complex phenomenon of contemporary Paganism, which advocates for a return to the particularistic religious pagan roots, Europe will happily unify if every culture returns to their own unique *Volksgeist*, which can be discovered in their own language, poetry, and perhaps even religion. The memory of the past, then, constructs a strong identity, whereby Europe can rediscover its power due to unity in diversity.

This article has been an initial quest to delve deeper into the question of the perceptions of Germanic pagans during the Romantic Era in the land that we now know as Germany. More research is needed to examine the hypothesis that the religious interest in the Germanic pagans arose due to German Romanticism. The works of Herder offer an interesting starting point for this search, and a thorough analysis considering paganism as the religion of the ancestors as part of the *Volksgeist* could provide answers. Subsequently, the

works of other Romantics should be examined considering the religious interest in pagans, so that insight within the historical development of the perceptions of paganism can be given. In other words: the Romantic quest to go back to the roots and rediscover paganism.

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